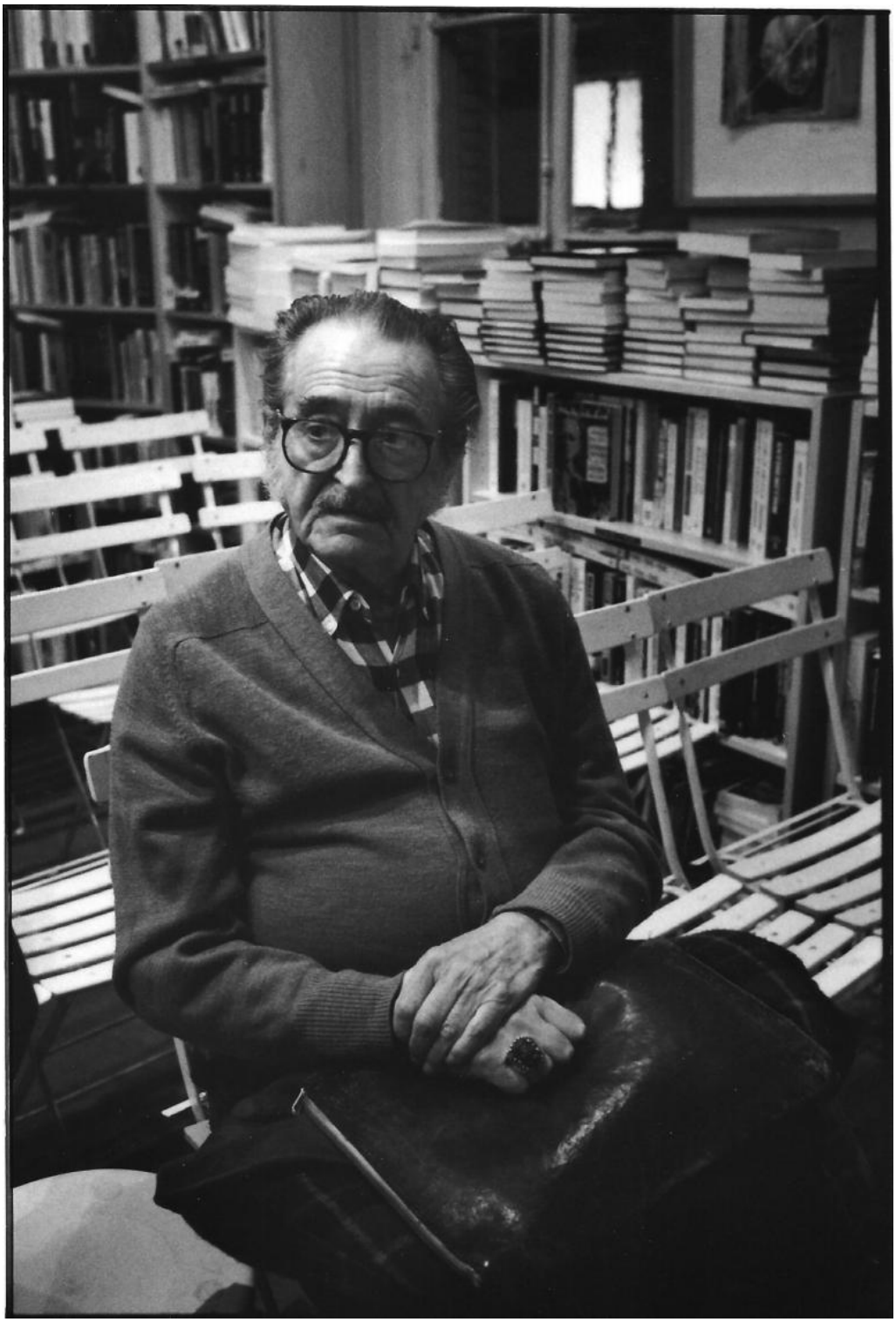
Edouard Roditi

Paul Celan & The Cult of Personality

Alyscamps Press, Paris
in association with
Michael Neal
Cayeux-sur-Mer

Paul Celan
&
The Cult of Personality



Edouard Roditi at the Village Voice bookshop in Paris.

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Paul Celan
&
The Cult of Personality

Edited, with a
Preface
By
Karl Orend

Alyscamps Press
Paris

Paul Celan & The Cult of Personality
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This edition is dedicated to Edouard Roditi's
friend and collaborator, Michael Neal.

Book design by Karl Orend and Charles Clark.

Paul Celan
&
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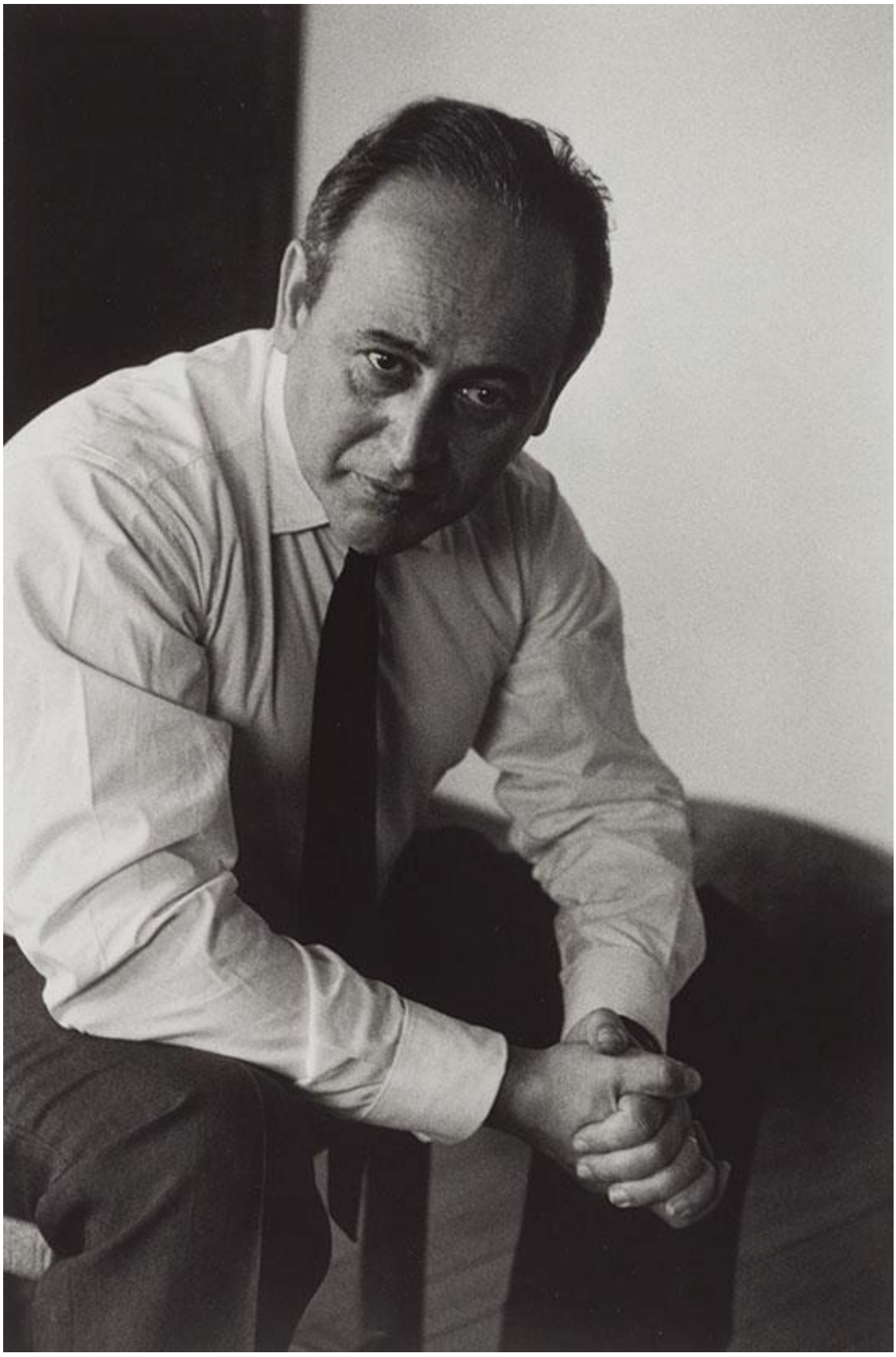

Paul Celan in Paris.

Preface

Paul Celan is one of the most widely translated, studied and written about poets of the twentieth century. Edouard Roditi, in contrast, is unknown to the general public, even if amongst those with a deep interest in literature and art he is often seen as an important and brilliant contributor in the fields of literature, translation, and art and literary criticism. Born into a Sephardic family in Paris in 1910, Roditi studied at Oxford and The University of Chicago, and from his early years had contact with important figures in twentieth century literature. At the age of nineteen he published the first Surrealist manifesto in English, entitled *The New Reality*. He became a partner in *Éditions de Saggitaire*, a major publisher of Surrealist works, and a friend of several Surrealists, especially André Breton, whose work he later translated. He had also begun to translate Léon-Paul Fargue and other important French writers before he was twenty.

Roditi befriended James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Sylvia Beach and many other important literary figures, also publishing in, among others, *Transition* and *The Criterion*. Between 1929-37 he lived in London, Paris and Berlin. He moved to America once the likelihood of War became imminent. He was later an interpreter at the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal. For the rest of his life, first in America, and later in Paris, Roditi held several important teaching positions at Universities, and worked as a high-level translator and simultaneous interpreter, often for the American Government. Roditi was multilingual and made his name as a major literary translator from and into languages as diverse as German, Portuguese, Hebrew, Spanish, Danish and Turkish. For example, he translated Fernando Pessoa's poems into German and Yeshar Kemal into English. Roditi published and translated many books, ranging from short stories and poems to literary essays, memoirs, novels, literary and art criticism and interviews with famous subjects. Some of his

books, such as *Dialogues on Art*, are considered modern classics.

In the latter part of his life, Edouard Roditi wrote a series of essays and short memoirs about his interactions with famous writers. The following essay on Paul Celan, published here as a facsimile of the manuscript, was the most controversial. It was published in *World Literature Today*. Volume 66. No.1 (Winter 1992) pp.11 – 20, and either escaped notice because of the obscurity of the journal, or met with a hostile reaction, as Roditi could have expected. This text shows the depth of knowledge and scholarship typical of Roditi's essays, and the breadth of his learning, which was evidenced in everything he wrote. Roditi's thesis is the Paul Celan has become so closely identified with the Holocaust, even though he did not directly witness the events at the death camps, that he is considered above criticism or critical examination. Celan was once called "the true bard of the Holocaust."

Edouard Roditi contends that a cult of personality has developed around Paul Celan to the point that one cannot write openly or honestly about his work or his private life. Indeed, most writings about his private life avoid altogether anything that might lead to him to be seen as anything less than perfect. Roditi argues that, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, both gentiles and Jews needed a living poet writing in German to whom they could attach their guilt feelings. That Celan was acutely aware of this is obvious from his mistrust of awards given to him in Germany, and his near paranoia about the motivations of certain writers, critics and publishers in Germany. Celan was convinced that every German had "his Jew" to assuage his conscience. This topic appeared frequently in his exchanges with another great German Jewish poet, Nobel laureate, Nelly Sachs. The two saw each other as siblings, united by their suffering and role as witnesses to the horrors the Jewish people had endured. Sachs told Celan "we belong to death in the innermost sense." Sachs wrote letters to Celan addressed to her "beloved brother."

Sachs, like Celan, never witnessed the horrors of the death camps personally.[1] She was from a wealthy family, and when she learned she might be sent to a labor camp escaped to Sweden with the help of the famous novelist Selma Lagerlöf, and the Swedish Royal Family, in 1940. She lived out the War in peace. She learned Swedish and worked as a translator.

Nelly Sachs only came to notice as a poet in 1947, with the collection *In den Wohnungen des Todes*, which dealt with the Holocaust. Each of her succeeding volumes would develop her engagement with the theme. She became the female counterpart to Celan in establishing the Shoah as a central part of the German-language poetic canon. Both Celan and Sachs later suffered from paranoia, deep depression, mental illness, underwent electroshock therapy and hospitalization in a mental hospital, and trusted very few in the professional world in

[1] Celan did lose both his parents in the death camps ; his father to illness, and his mother was shot when she became too weak to work.

which they had to exist. Anything that questioned their actions or motivations elicited an extreme response, and accusations of anti-Semitism. Some of Nelly Sachs' letters to Celan reveal her often highly unstable frame of mind.

On July 25th 1960, she wrote to him:

"A Nazi spiritualist league is using radio telegraph to hunt me with terrifying sophistication, they know everything, everywhere I set foot. They tried with nerve gas when I was travelling. Been in my house secretly for years, listening with a microphone through the walls, so I want to give Eric a part of the compensation money, the other part is to go to Gudrun in my testament..."

She was, in her own words, "within a hair of mental and physical ruin." Sachs was in such a poor mental state that, for a time, her signature wasn't legally valid on documents. Celan tried to bolster her, but at times sank into his own despair. Roditi claims that Celan assumed the role as "the true bard of the Holocaust" to the

degree that it informed everything he wrote and did, from the way that he posed for staged photographs to the way he interacted with others in public settings. At the time Roditi wrote this essay, English-speaking readers did not know Celan's early Romanian poems and about his youth in Romania. This has been somewhat remedied since by the appearance of translations of his Romanian poems by Nina Cassian and others,[2] and the translation of the major biography of his early years by Israel Chalfen, which Roditi knew in German.

Edouard Roditi first met Paul Celan in Paris in 1952. Both were literary figures, both were Jews, and both were translators and poets. They had friends and interests in common. Celan wrote referencing the Holocaust, and Roditi had been a translator at the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal. They had much common ground.

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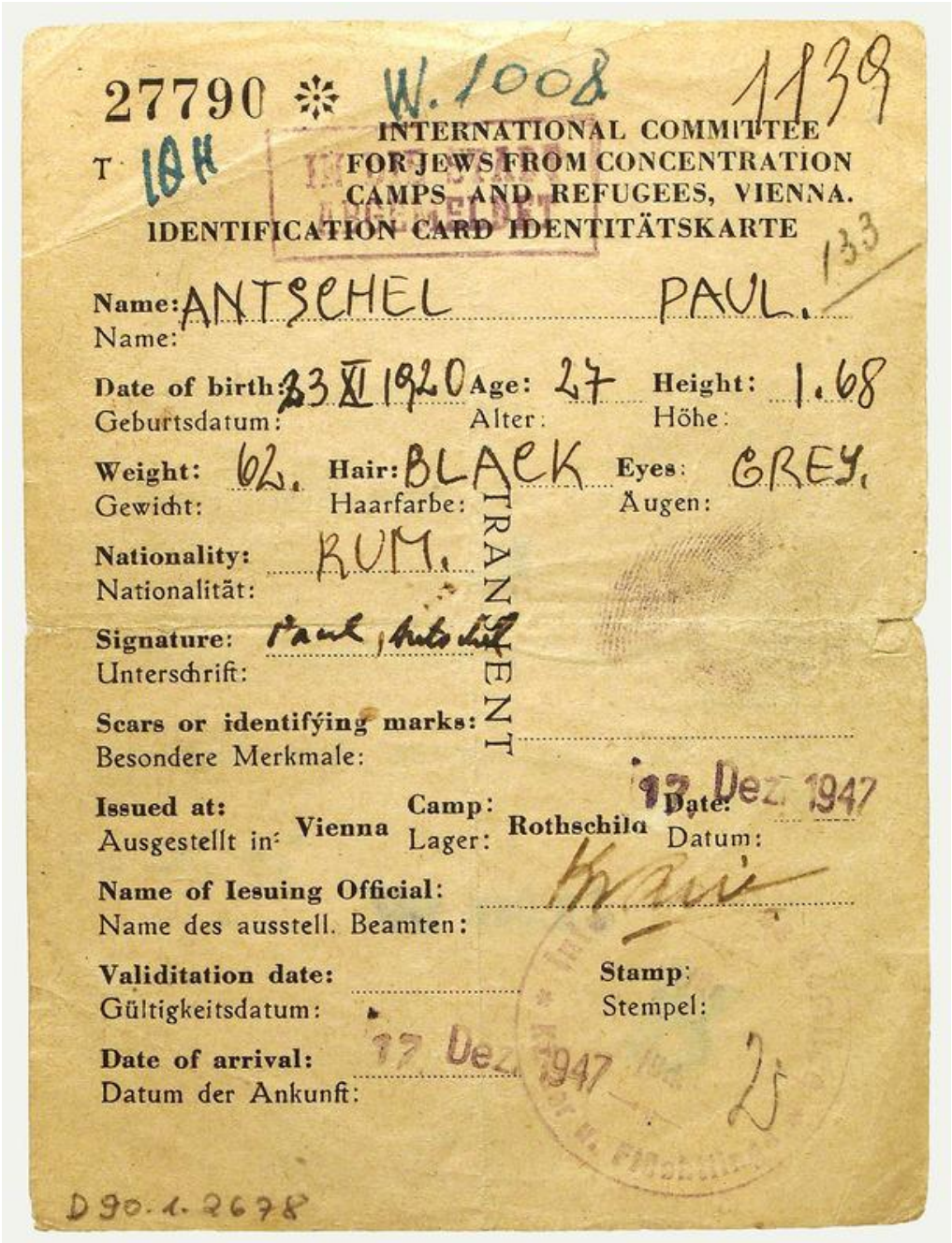
[2] Paul Celan *Romanian Poems* translated by Julien Semilien and Sanda Agalidi (Green Integer 2003) and *Romainan Poems* translated by Nina Cassian (Syracuse University Press 2015). *Paul Celan: a biography of his youth* by Israel Chalfen (Persea Books 1991).

Roditi was, in fact, the first English-language writer to show an abiding interest in Celan. The two became friends and saw each other over a period of years. Roditi did some joint translations with Celan, which now only appear under Celan's name, and Roditi also corrected some of Celan's translations. Roditi's knowledge of English and French was superior to Celan's. Roditi, it must be remembered, was not just a literary translator of the highest order, but also a simultaneous interpreter, with a remarkable knowledge of the subtleties and flexibilities of language and communication. Roditi argues that many of Celan's influences are often ignored in discussions of his work, such as Heine, the Romanian Surrealists, German language contemporaries in Czernowitz, French poets like René Char, and German language poets like Sachs and Else Lasker-Schüler. Indeed, when Roditi mentioned to Celan the influence of the latter on his work, Celan reacted as if he had been accused of plagiarism.



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INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE
FOR JEWS FROM CONCENTRATION
CAMPS AND REFUGEES, VIENNA.
IDENTIFICATION CARD IDENTITÄTSKARTE

133

Name: ANTSCHEL PAUL.
Name:

Date of birth: 23 XI 1920 Age: 27 Height: 1.68
Geburtsdatum: Alter: Höhe:

Weight: 62. Hair: BLACK Eyes: GREY.
Gewicht: Haarfarbe: Augen:

Nationality: RUM.
Nationalität:

Signature: Paul Antschel
Unterschrift:

Scars or identifying marks:
Besondere Merkmale:

TRANSIENT

Issued at: Vienna Camp: Rothschild Date: 12 Dez 1947
Ausgestellt in: Lager: Datum:

Name of Iesuing Official:
Name des ausstell. Beamten:

Validitation date: Stamp:
Gültigkeitsdatum: Stempel:

Date of arrival: 17 Dez 1947
Datum der Ankunft:

D 90. 1. 2678

Paul Celan: refugee card.

Accusations of plagiarism are a topic that arises in Roditi's memoir of Celan. Roditi was much more acutely aware than most readers of the traditions within which Celan worked. He could see his influences and "borrowing" clearly. One of the major traumas of Paul Celan's life arose first in 1953 when Claire Goll accused him of plagiarizing the work of her recently deceased husband Yvan Goll, three books of whose poems Celan had translated. This accusation became highly public in 1960, shortly after Celan had won a major literary prize in Germany. Celan had only been in Paris for five years in 1953. Goll had been a well-known name in the city for thirty. This event, unfolding over the next few years, led Celan to fall into paranoia, and desperate attempts to absolve him of the charge. He approached Roditi, to act as a "witness for the defense." Roditi laughed it off, remarking that all great poets, whether Shakespeare, Virgil or Dante, borrow from other poets. He had already witnessed borrowing from other poets in Celan's works, notably the most famous image in his most famous poem *Todesfuge*. Roditi

remarked: "all poets whether consciously or unconsciously reflect some of their readings in their own poems." Celan reacted in the usual way he did to criticism or contradiction; he accused Roditi, the Jewish homosexual writer who had been an interpreter at the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal, of being an anti-Semite. Roditi had seen Hitler's Germany at first hand in the 1930s, and this had deepened his involvement in his Jewish heritage and Jewish literature. During the War he worked for Voice of America broadcasting anti-Nazi programs into Germany. He even later wrote about anti-Semitism and xenophobia in France. The idea of Roditi, the Jew, as an anti-Semite was laughable.

Not widely known in English, Yvan Goll was definitely not a nonentity. He had powerful friends and a high status in the literary and artistic community. He was a bilingual, Jewish, French-German poet who wrote in both languages, since he had grown up in Alsace. He began his literary career as an Expressionist poet in Germany, but then became involved with

Dada (and later Surrealism) through his friendships with Tristan Tzara (Romanian, like Celan), Hans Arp and Francis Picabia. After meeting his wife Claire, they settled in Paris where Goll became famous as the translator of Blaise Cendrars among many others. He even collaborated with Samuel Beckett on translating Joyce. Goll had befriended Joyce during the latter's Zurich years. He translated many works between French and German in both directions. Goll was friends with many of the leading writers and painters of that time. Léger, Picasso, Chagall and Delaunay all illustrated volumes of Goll's poems. Goll had founded the magazine *Surréalisme*, which published Breton's *First Surrealist Manifesto*. He also collaborated, alongside Bertolt Brecht, with Kurt Weil.

Yvan and Claire Goll spent the Second World War years in America, where they were friends with several American writers, including Henry Miller, Kenneth Patchen, William Carlos Williams, and Richard Wright. Goll translated

a lot of poetry during those years, including work by Breton, Aimé Césaire, and Saint-Jean Perse. Williams translated Goll into English. Goll also founded the Anglo-French magazine *Hemispheres*. Before his untimely death from cancer in 1950, he had published over fifty books, many illustrated by leading artists of the time. Claire Goll, although much less known, was also a writer, who published many books of poetry, prose and memoir, as well as many translations, during her lifetime. Claire was the translator of, among others, Emil Ludwig, Stefan Zweig and Franz Werfel. She had once been the lover of Rilke, with whom she maintained a close friendship. She had been raised in a wealthy Jewish family. Her mother and two of her aunts were murdered at Auschwitz. In 1952, she shared an important literary award with Heinrich Böll, and later won the Katherine Mansfield Literary Prize. Her later work shows a strong engagement with Jewish themes, after decades of non-observance.

The Paul Celan in Paris of 1953 was not the Paul Celan we know today. He had recently

published only his second significant volume of poems[3] and was working at the École normale supérieur on the Rue d'Ulm. He would remain an obscure and little known poet and translator in France until after his death by suicide in 1970. Apart from translating work, none of his books appear in the catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale until 1959. He was largely isolated in the literary community, lonely and unknown. Celan might have had good reason to fear that both his teaching job and his career as a poet/translator were under immediate and imminent threat by Claire Goll's accusation. The Goll affair was not the only time Celan was caught up in controversy. Max Frisch, like Roditi, later refused to come to his aid after a review he considered anti-Semitic, thinking Celan was grossly overreacting.

Paul Celan met his wealthy future wife Gisèle Lestrange in late 1951. They married the following year. Their first son would die shortly

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[3] Paul Celan *Der Sand aus den Urnen* (1948) *Mohn et Gedächtnis* (1952).

after birth, in 1953. A second son was born in 1955. While hagiographers have tried to portray the marriage between Paul the poet and Gisèle the artist, usually working in etchings, as an ideal love match, others have suggested that Celan married in part for financial reasons and in part to ensure his residency in France. Indeed, Gisèle's father, who died in 1943, had been a fascist and an open supporter of Pétain; an unlikely match for the "true bard of the Holocaust." This inconsistency was echoed in Celan's ongoing fascination with Nazi philosopher Martin Heidegger, whom he discovered through his love relationship with Ingeborg Bachmann. Bachmann had written a thesis on Heidegger and knew him personally. Celan actually met Heidegger. The philosopher thought Celan was "sick" and "incurable." Bachmann's father was also a Nazi. Bachmann and Celan would resume their affair in 1957. Bachmann who suffered from mental illness, was later an alcoholic addicted to prescription medications, and in and out of mental institutions. A friend recalled her, in the sixties:

"I was deeply shocked by the magnitude of her pill addiction. It must have been 100 per day ; the bin was full of empty boxes. She looked bad, she was pale, like wax. Her whole body was full of bruises. I wondered, what could have caused it. Then I saw how she dropped her Gauloise that she was smoking and let it burn out on her arm, I realized ; burns caused by falling cigarettes. The quantity of pills had made her body insensitive to pain."[4]

Paul Celan would have various affairs over the years, and even before and after he married Gisèle was in the midst of an affair with Britta Eisenreich, whom he met in 1952. Eisenreich described Celan, shortly after the death of his son, standing under her window whistling Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*, to get her attention. In 1956, she aborted Celan's child in Berlin. He refused to travel with her. Gisèle, at some point found out about the affair and his

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[4] Peter Beicken: *Ingeborg Bachmann.* Becksche Reihe 605, 2. Auflage. München 1992, S. 213.

secret letters, written under the name Bruno Ferrari. Celan, living out a *Jules et Jim* fantasy, saw nothing wrong with both women getting along and sharing him. Indeed, when the Claire Goll affair erupted, Celan insisted Eisenreich "verjuden" (Judaize) herself so he could be sure she was on his side, and not an anti-Semite! Her name doesn't even appear in biographies of Celan. Neither do his outbursts of violence, nor do the threatening behavior that would have led to most people being incarcerated. John Felstiner refers in passing to Celan, in the late 1960s, as being "sometimes violent, even suicidal," but skims over the behavior, which included abusing his wife and chasing her, trying to stab her with a carving knife. Celan's behavior is excused because he was "sick." By March 1967, Gisèle had departed, and spoke of the "wall of incomprehension" that existed between them. They saw each other rarely thereafter.

The Goll Affair played directly into Paul Celan's paranoia. He was always "hypersensitive to anything that might discredit

him." [5] "He demanded "purity" from his publishers, and left them if he had the slightest hesitation about any of their behavior. He said that he was only awarded the Büchner Preis so that his enemies could "better run me down." "If you weren't one hundred percent with him, you were against him." In most cases, if a charge of plagiarism is made, the matter will be settled quickly. The intent was there or it wasn't; the borrowing is there or it isn't. For Celan and his admirers, the accusation would not be so simply put to rest. Those who loved Celan had to crush any possibility that a borrowing might exist, and destroy and discredit the accuser. Roditi would have seen confirmation in his belief that Celan was the figurehead of a cult of personality by the very fact that a massive tome of 925 pages was published by Suhrkamp defending him from the accusation, under the title *Paul Celan: Die Goll-Affäre: Dokumente zu einer 'Infamie.'* (Suhrkamp 2000, edited by Barbara Wiedemann). Celan had already been

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[5] John Felstiner *Paul Celan : Poet, Survivor, Jew* Yale U.P. 2001 p. 189.

dead thirty years. Claire Goll had been dead for twenty-three, but her accusation must be buried in an avalanche of documents and evidence. Her bad faith had to be made apparent. The accusation was an "Infamie," with every bad connotation that implied. The warning was there for anyone who would dare to write negatively about Celan. Even decades after you had done so, his supporters would come back to destroy you and your credibility. Another result of the drama that unfolded is that Yvan Goll's poetry fell into total neglect, as people became scared to be associated with his name, even though he was dead by the time his wife first made the accusation.

Paul Celan, then living in a hotel at 31 rue des Ecoles, first met Yvan Goll in November 1949, in Paris. Celan sought out the contact because he wished to pass on greetings from a mutual poet friend, Alfred Sperber, in Bucharest, and because he hoped to find an established Jewish writer sympathetic to his work. Celan met the Golls and he read to them from his most recent poems.

Yvan Goll recalled:

"Claire and I agreed we found them admirable, pure and wise, poems where the ghosts of Rilke and Trakl gradually gave way to his own obvious genius. *Todsefuge*, particularly, captivated and bewitched us."

He found Celan both timid and proud. Celan had brought along eight red roses for Claire, and a copy of his book of poems *Der Sand aus den Urnen* (Wien 1948) for Yvan. He seemed poor, and the Golls insisted he stay for a light supper. Yvan Goll was terminally ill and largely isolated by this point, and he soon hoped Celan would translate his final French poems into German. He didn't have the strength to do it himself. He was receiving blood transfusions, which would last up to five hours. Celan remembered that first meeting on November 6th and wrote that Goll was:

"...a true poet. A Mensch: The first I have encountered in Paris....Goll knows all the greats of our time: Rilke, Joyce, Picasso, all of them!" [6]

Picasso had illustrated Goll's latest book. That was lofty company indeed. Knowing he was dying, Goll was, shortly after hospitalized, and in the process of trying to set up a foundation where part of his Estate would make funds available to publish his and Claire's work after his death, with any leftover money being directed to the support of young poets. Celan was named one of the four administrators. Goll died at the end of February 1950. Celan wrote poems dedicated to both Yvan and Claire. He also translated into German the substantial number of poems Yvan Goll had requested. The three obviously considered each other close, even if they had not known each other for long. In the two years following Yvan's death, Claire and Celan kept in touch via letter when they weren't both in Paris. Claire was often travelling, trying to escape from the loneliness

[6] Letter to Erica Lillegg November 11th 1949.

she felt in Yvan's absence. Her letters are addressed to "Liebes Päulchen." She would then spend much time in New York, living with friends.

Claire and Yvan Goll.

When Paul Celan finished his versions of Goll's poems, the intended publisher, Franz Vetter, rejected them, in the following terms:

25.12.51

Dear Monsieur Celan,

Madame Goll has brought me your translation of "Chansons Malaises" by Yvan Goll. I read them through and find them very different from the originals. Since this is a translation, I prefer to publish Yvan Goll, and not a distant poetic recreation by Paul Celan. You have taken too many liberties I feel. I wouldn't permit myself to minimize your talent as a poet, but I want to have a faithful translation of these magnificent *Chansons*. I always hoped Madame Goll would translate the poems herself and I asked her to do so... .

When Vetter didn't return the manuscript promptly, as Celan requested, Celan threatened him with legal action. Celan also opposed any other version of a translation being published. He also reached out to Claire Goll. He told her about Vetter's reaction, which he found offensive both to himself and the memory of

her husband : Especially since Yvan Goll had chosen Celan to be one of his literary executors. Celan asked Claire to put formally into writing what had, until now, only been a verbal agreement concerning the three volumes of her husband's work that Celan had translated.

She replied, in turn, offended:

Paris 8.1.52

Paul,

Je ne voulais pas t'écrire pour plusieurs raisons.
1) Pour ne pas devoir te dire, que depuis longtemps, je ne reconnais plus le Paul, qui quelques semaines avant la mort d'Yvan venait à nous, timide, dévoué, chaleureux envers nous
2) Pour ne pas devoir te dire, comment, de mon côté, je ressens le ton de ta lettre **recommandée** comme une offense.
3) Pour ne pas te devoir dire, à quel point m'avaient blessée ton faux-pas au téléphone et ton dernier geste, "Exécuteur testamentaire Littéraire" ! Quelle arrogance ! Crois-tu réellement qu'Yvan aurait mis quelque chose

par écrit de mon vivant à moi ! Lui qui, jamais ne manquait de tact ! Il s'agissait du futur Fonds "Claire et Yvan Goll" à créer sous ta caution et celle de Bosquet, **mais, après ma mort.**
C. G.

Eu égard à ton attitude irrespectueuse d'aujourd'hui, aussi bien vis à vis de mon défunt que de moi-même, je me pose la question s'il n'est pas nécessaire de taper à la machine ton manuscrit pour pouvoir à tout moment confronter les 2 versions complètement différentes, la tienne et la mienne.

The first signs that Claire Goll called into question Paul Celan allegedly plagiarizing her husband's work came a year later, in August 1953. It was not something she kept to herself, but also not something she made widely public. Celan was still a relative unknown at the time. It would not enter the wider public domain until April 1960. In the meantime there had been private letters and anonymous letters circulating mentioning the accusation. Celan became aware of the smear campaign in March

1954. Claire Goll remembered that Richard Exner, a young German Professor at University of Southern California, and sometime poet, came to visit her in 1953 and brought her a copy of Celan's *Mohn und Gedächtnis*. He told her that he thought that the book was filled with inspiration from Yvan Goll's *Traumkraut* (1951). Exner even wrote to Celan directly, on August 5th 1953, asking him if Goll inspired his verse. Claire Goll subsequently claimed parts were lifted directly from her husband's work, and others were imitations of Goll. In May 1956, a letter was written to *Cahiers du Sud,* under the name N. Bluerse, mentioning that Claire's husband had inspired Celan's work. It claimed the "fact" was well known in German literary circles. It cited Georg Maurer, who had written, during a discussion of recent poetry:

"I only have to mention the example of the master-plagiarist Paul Celan, who in his poetry, in mediocre fashion, copied that which Yvan Goll expressed with mastery."

Cahiers de Sud was considered by many to be the leading French literary review. Obviously Celan had reason to be alarmed. The actual letter to the journal contained faults in French that suggested a native English speaker had written it.

Paul Celan turned to all those he thought might defend him, including Roditi. Celan wrote a long letter, for example, to the writer and radio editor Alfred Andersch, explaining his interactions with Goll and defending himself.[7] He also drafted a letter to Sartre and other important figures. The topic really came to center stage when Celan was awarded the Büchner Preis (1960). Roditi had, by now, begun to tire of Celan personally, and gradually came to think of him as "pathologically egocentric" and "self-centered." Roditi knew

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[7] Andersch was actually taught at school by the father of Heinrich Himmler. Anders fought four years in the Wehrmacht before deserting near the end of the War. He was a close supporter of Ernst Jünger, who had also served in the German army. Celan came to know him through Ingeborg Bachmann.

that Celan had definitely borrowed from other poets in the past, as many poets and composers did. Years later, it has become commonplace to blame Claire Goll and the accusations she made for being totally or partially responsible for Paul Celan's suicide. The theme was explored, for example, in Yves Bonnefoy's *Ce Qui Alarma Paul Celan* (Galilée 2006).

Memorials to Paul Celan.

With the passing of time, it is usually accepted that Celan was not guilty of plagiarism. Some believe that Claire Goll actually manipulated the evidence to make it appear there was intentional copying. Though why she would do that in 1953 when Celan was still a nonentity in France is questionable. It's highly unlikely that the accusation was the cause of Paul Celan's suicide. There were enough problems, sickness and circumstances, plus warning signs in his life at that time, to make the outcome not unlikely. Suicide was the response of others

who had been completely absorbed in contemplation of and expression of the Holocaust, such as Primo Levi, Jean Améry and Celan's close friend Peter Szondi. Szondi actually copied Celan's death by drowning the following year. Paul Celan drowned himself in the Seine around April 20th 1970, entering the river at the Pont Mirabeau. He was living at 6 avenue Emile Zola nearby. He was a strong swimmer and there was no doubt it was deliberate. The bridge was chosen for the poetic links to Apollinaire. Celan was living alone, and so not immediately missed. He failed to turn up to teach his classes at rue d'Ulm. The concièrge noticed his mail was piling up under his door. His wife was contacted, but she thought maybe he had gone to Prague. Only on May first did a fisherman find his body downstream, trapped against a filter. Paul Celan was buried on May 12th in Thiais cemetery. Hearing the news, Nelly Sachs was devastated, shaken to the core. She died the day of his interment.

Karl Orend
Meudon

of Heine. His curious reticence concerning the poetry of Heine as well as his exceptional talent as a multilingual translator of American, English, French, Hebrew, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian or Russian poets into German are rare characteristics that he shared with only one other German poet, August Graf von Platen, whose Venezianische Sonnetten I know that Celan admired, since we once read them aloud together in Paris after I had pointed out to him how much I felt that they had influenced some of Stefan George's early sonnets and perhaps too Rilke's Sonnetten an Orpheus.

But Celan's few Romanian-language poems and some of the German-language poems of Mohn und Gedachtnis suddenly display quite clearly the influence of the Romanian-language poetry of the Surrealist friends, such as Gherasim Luca, among others, with whom he was associating very closely in Bucharest between the Spring of 1945 and the end of 1947. Celan can also be reasonably suspected of having then become acquainted with some of the Romanian-language poetry of two outstanding and slightly older Romanian-Jewish writers, the poet Benjamin Fundoianu (Benjamin Wechsler), who is more widely known as the French-language poet and philosopher Benjamin Fondane, deported from Paris by the Germans and murdered by them in the gas-chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau in October 1944, and the bilingual Romanian and French poet Ilarie Voronca, whose grief over the loss of so many relatives and friends as victims of the Holocaust led him to commit suicide in despair in France in 1946. Long neglected in their native Romania under its anti-Semitic régime as an ally of Nazi Germany, these two poets were both being read and discussed again in 1945 in Bucharest's avant-garde literary circles that Celan frequented.

From readings of Fundoianu's less overtly Dadaist or Integralist Romanian-language poems of 1917 and 1918 about the rural life of his native province of Moldavia and entitled "Hertza" in his first published collection, Tagaduinta lui Petru (Bucharest, 1918), Celan may well have learned to develop his own equally nostalgic kind of nature-poetry inspired by memories of the countryside of his native Bukovina. Such poems as "Der Geheimnis der Farne" in Mohn und Gedächtnis are no longer at all like most of the more conventional lyrics that he had still been writing a few years earlier in Czernowitz:

"In the vault of swords the leaf-green heart of the shadows
perceives its own reflection.
The blades are bright: in death, who wouldn't linger before
mirrors?
Here too one toasts in mugs full of a living nostalgia
that froths high in dark blossoms before one drinks it as if
it weren't water,
as though it were a daisy whose petals are questioned about
an even darker love,
about a pillow more black for one's couch, about even heavier
hair..."

Translated here into English, these lines from Celan's "The Secret of the Ferns" might indeed remind one of the mood of Fundoianu's "Hertza":

"This autumn— one wonders why— the day shrank so much.
The barren field approached the village, so black and timid,
as if it wanted to slip through the undergrowth of fences
and set foot once more in the attics and barns.
And something here is missing from what once was:
behind the windows of houses one senses the presence of adobe
hallways
and of roofs that jut over empty rooms and are full
of nettles and manure driven there by rains and wind."

A more systematic study of the writings of other Romanian-language poets with whom Celan is known to have associates in Bucharest or whom one can reasonably presume that he read would surely produce even more convincing evidence of the importance of his own Romanian-language poems as a veritable turning-point in his evolution as a German-language poet.

But three further avenues of investigation which might lead to an equally significant understanding of Celan's whole evolution as a poet appear to remain likewise unexplored by most of the more rhapsodic hierophants of the cult of his personality. The first of these would consist in a systematic study, already undertaken to some extent by Professor Jerry Glenn and a few others, of the German-language poetry of two of Celan's Czernowitz-born and German-language contemporaries, the poets Immanuel Wasserglass and Alfred Gong (Likornik), with both of whom he began to associate even in his adolescence, and of three older Czernowitz-born German-language poets of some distinction, Rose Ausländer, Alfred Kittner and Alfred Margul-Sperber, with all three of whom Celan is known to have associated closely in Czernowitz on his return from a Romanian forced-labor camp in Moldavia or later too in Bucharest.

The second of these generally neglected avenues of investigation would consist in a systematic study of the writings of the few French poets, above all René Char, André du Bouchet and Jean Daive, with whom Celan is known to have associated and sympathized in the years that he later spent in Paris. One of the poems of Von Schwelle zu Schwelle, the first volume of those composed in France, is indeed entitled "Argumentum e Silentio" and is dedicated to Char, whom Celan translated and admired and

who is recognized as having been, in his own poetry of the decades that immediately followed World War II, increasingly cryptic and a veritable apostle of the rhetorical trope known as aposiopesis, which consists in refraining from being more explicit and was then consistently practiced by Char's younger disciples, above all by du Bouchet and Daive, both of whom were close friends of Celan, who even translated a number of their poems into German and was translated in turn into French by Daive. Such a study of the poetry of Char, du Bouchet, Daive and their friend Jean Dupin, who was also translated into German by Celan, would surely yield some valid explanations for a few of the more cryptic statements or evasions of overt statement, in fact examples of aposiopesis, that can puzzle readers of much of Celan's later German poetry.

The third of these neglected avenues of investigation might consist in a study of the very few poets who wrote on specifically Jewish themes and with whose writings Celan is known to have first become acquainted in Bucharest, Vienna or Paris. These would include Else Lasker-Schüler, whom he had been urged to read by Margul-Sperber in Bucharest and a few months later in Innsbruck by Ludwig von Ficker and the latter's Swedish wife, then Nelly Sachs too, whom he is known to have met if only briefly in Zurich, and finally the Egyptian-born French-language poet Edmond Jabes, one of the very last friends on whom Celan called in Paris shortly before his suicide. Perhaps one should also include here Alexander Koval's German translation of my own Three Hebrew Elegies, published in Berlin by Karlheinz Henssel Verlag and of which Koval gave Celan a copy in Paris.

Many of the increasingly cryptic references to anything Jewish in Celan's later poetry display indeed very little affinity with the more rationalistic and conventional

Judaism of the German Haskalah in which he had been schooled for his Bar Mitzvah or with the more popular and folkloristic Yiddish writings of Itzik Manger and Elieser Steinbarg, for whose "jargon" Celan so often expressed contempt in Czernowitz. On the contrary, most of the references to anything Jewish that appear in Celan's later poetry suggest a new interest in the Cabbalah and perhaps in the writings of Gershom Scholem, in fact in the kind of Jewish mysticism that Celan could find in the poetry of Jabes and perhaps in mine too. In addition, it might be of some interest to investigate whether Celan was at all acquainted, before his brief visit to Israel so soon before his suicide, with any of the truly great Hebrew poetry of Dan Pagis, a Bukovina-born Romanian-Jewish survivor of the Nazi extermination-camps in Transnistria who, like his compatriots the Hebrew novelist Aharon Appelfeld and the Israeli painters Avigdor Arikha and Arnold Daganí, preferred to turn his back on the German culture which had produced as its spell-bound changelings so many vicious anti-Semites. In all of Celan's earlier and more traditional German-language poetry written in Czernowitz before the summer of 1941, when the parents and sister of Celan's friend Alfred Gong (Likornik) were suddenly deported , together with some four thousand other Jews, by the Soviets from Czernowitz to Siberia, practically nothing displays his awareness of being a Jew, his fluency in the Yiddish that was still widely spoken in most Jewish homes of Bukovina, or his knowmedge of Hebrew. Nor can one detect here much evidence of his fluency in Romanian, which allowed him a few years later to distinguish himself in Bucharest as a Romanian-language poet of some promise and as an exceptionally good literary translator of Russian classics.

Celan's early German-language lyrics display, of course, some evidence of his acquaintance with nineteenth-century French poetry. Even before the year that he spent in France as a student, preparing in Tours his admission to a medical school, he expressed in Czernowitz his admiration for Baudelaire and Verlaine, whom he would certainly have been inspired to read as a consequence of his great admiration for Rilke. But it was only later that he was exposed in Bucharest, through his Romanian friends Ghellu Naum, Gherasim Luca, Nina Cassian, Paul Paun (Zaharia Zaharia) and Petre Solomon, most of whom were members of the Romanian Surrealist group, not only to Romanian-language Dadaist, Integralist or Surrealist poetry, such as that of Tristan Tzara (Samy Rosenstock), Ion Vinea, Ion Caraion, Benjamin Fundoianu and Ilarie Voronca, but also to a certain amount of Surrealist writing in French, including some of the works of André Breton. This certainly prepared him for his later confrontation in Paris as German translator with the work of such French poets as Antonin Artaud, André Breton, René Char, Robert Desnos, Paul Eluard, Henri Michaux, Benjamin Péret and Aimé Césaire. But the impact of his sudden confrontation in Bucharest with Romanian or French literary Surrealism is most clearly illustrated in the few lyrics or pieces of poetic prose that he now composed in Romanian as well as in the German-language poetry that he wrote either while still living in Bucharest or in the course of his brief sojourn in Vienna, the cultural Mecca of both his poor mother's and his own dreams which so bitterly disappointed him and Alfred Gong when they both managed at last to escape there from Communist Bucharest.

Only in Romania have Celan's Romanian-language poems been so far granted the critical attention that they deserve. Elsewhere, they have been almost scornfully neglected, probably as a consequence of Celan's oft-quoted but nevertheless absurd statement: "Only in one's mother's tongue can one express one's own truth. In a foreign language the poet lies." Were Dante and Milton lying when they wrote their magnificent poems in Latin? Is the "Dies irae" a lie, together with so much other great medieval poetry composed in Latin? Was Rilke likewise lying when he wrote his few exquisite but quite unpretentious poems in French? In expressing this opinion, Celan was indeed voicing a critical prejudice that has its source in the attacks on Classicism and Humanism of those nineteenth-century Romantics who were political and linguistic nationalists. Is a poet's language breast-fed to him by his mother? Why didn't Celan choose to write his poetry in Yiddish, the language that his father often spoke according to all available testimony, but that his purist mother abhorred? Celan's choice of the Hochdeutsch of traditional German literature rather than the local German dialect of Bukovina as his vehicle for poetic expression was certainly dictated to him by obscure psychoanalytical forces. For similar reasons other bilingual writers have chosen to express themselves in the language of their father, if they were offered such a choice.

Be that all as it may, Celan's two years spent among his Romanian Surrealist friends in Bucharest appear to have exerted other and less strictly linguistic influences on his life. According to Chalfen's biography and the testimonies quoted there, Celan managed at last in Bucharest to free himself to some extent from the mother-fixation which, as long as he was still living in Czernowitz, led him to

continue prudishly repressing most of his sexual urges. Suddenly, Celan began to behave more freely in his relationships with women. From several of his Romanian-language writer-friends who likewise happened to be Jews, such as Paul Paun and Ovid Crohmalnicianu, he also adopted the custom of adopting a pseudonym as a writer, at first Paul Aurel as a successful translator from Russian into Romanian, later A. Pavel too, before finally choosing Paul Celan, an anagram of the Romanian spelling, Ancel, of his rather Germanic-Jewish family name Antschel. This last pseudonym ultimately became his official name too. Tristan Tzara, Benjamin Fundoianu or Fondane, Ilarie Voronow, Claude Sernet and Celan's friend Paul Paun are all Romanian-Jewish poets who, in order not to attract too much attention as Jews in anti-Semitic Romania, published their writings under these pseudonyms that sounded less Jewish than their Hebraic or Germanic family names.

Much of the impact of the Holocaust, of the murder of his parents in Transnistrian Nazi camps and of his own experiences in a Romanian forced-labor camp on Celan's psyche was first expressed, above all, in the poem "Todesfuge", to which he soon began to owe his international reputation as "the true bard of the Holocaust" and, in some more sceptical than truly anti-Semitic West-German literary circles as "unser Wiedergutmachungslyriker." But Celan expressed here his awareness of the extermination-camps mainly in terms and imagery borrowed from other poets, such as Rose Ausländer, who saved her own life and that of her sick mother by living in hiding in the cellars of abandoned homes of the Czernowitz ghettos, or as Immanuel Weissglass, who saved his own life as

well as his mother's from death in the Transnistrian camps where both Celan's parents perished so miserably. Other details of "Todesfuge" are borrowed from the painter Arnold Dagani's oral accounts of his own and his wife's survival and of the death, which he had witnessed in Transnistria, of Celan's young relative, the teen-ager German-language poet Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger. Dagani later wrote and published these accounts in an English translation as The Grave in the Cherry Orchard in English in numbers 291,292 and 293 of year XXL of the periodical entitled Adam. As we know from Chalfen's biography, Celan had personally experienced only the rigors of a Romanian forced-labor camp in Moldavia from which, according to testimony gathered by Chalfen, he was even occasionally able to return "on leave" to Czernowitz, perhaps thanks to bribery granted to a Romanian guard.

A close friend of Celan while the latter was living in Bucharest immediately after World War II, the Romanian-language poet and scholar Petre Solomon published a few years ago a remarkable book of personal memories of Celan, Paul Celan: Dimensiunea românească (Bucharest, Editura Criterion, 1987), which includes as an appendix Celan's Romanian-language poems in verse or prose, his Romanian translations of four short prose texts by Franz Kafka, and his letters from Vienna or Paris to Solomon, written at first from 1948 to 1951 in Romanian but later in French, as well as his letterw written from Vienna or Paris in German to the older Bukovina-born German-language poet Alfred Margul-Sperber, who had befriended Celan in Bucharest. All the letters originally written in French or German are published here in their original text, followed by a Romanian translation. Solomon's book was subsequently published in Paris in a French translation, which Celan's widow forced its publisher to withdraw from circulation. Later, she refused to permit the publication of an American translation of Solomon's book.

It is unfortunate that so few American scholars who display an interest in Celan can read Romanian. Petre Solomon's book alone contains factual material which might usefully correct some of the characteristic absurdities of the "cult of personality" that detract from the value of much current Celan scholarship. One is even left wondering why so much pathos is now lavished in America, England, France, Germany and Israel on Celan as a survivor of the Holocaust, rather than on any of the often equally gifted poets who can be numbered among its victims. It was of course easier to grant prestigious national prizes in Western Germany to Celan, a survivor, than to grant them posthumously to Jakov van Hoddis, Alfred Grunewald, Alma Johanna König, Gertrud Kolmar, Alfred Mombert or Juri Soyfer, who all died in Nazi concentration-camps, or to Bruder Sonka (Josef Sonnenschein), who survived Auschwitz only to die as a Trotzkist in a Stalinist jail in his native Czecho-Slovakia. Both the Gentile and the Jewish literary worlds needed a living poet on whom they could lavish their guilt feelings, th Germans above all for having failed to prevent the Holocaust and many Jews for not having morally deserved to survive it.

In the years that he lived in Paris and in the course of his frequent trips from Paris to Western Germany, Celan developed a sense of public relations that is well illustrated in most of the deliberately "soulful" photographs of him that are widely used for the publicity of his works, contrasting so strikingly with the much happier and mpre relaxed photographs of him that were taken earlier in Bucharest and that illustrate Petre Solomon's book. The original German edition of Chalfen's biography likewise offers us some refreshingly unassuming

photographs of Celan as an apparently more normal and sometimes even quite happy young man. But Chalfen also reveals, from the testimony of Celan's friends, that he already displayed as an adolescent in Czernowitz some talents and ambitions as an actor.

Both Chalfen and Solomon thus offer us valuable information on Celan's early life, literary tastes and activities, friendships and associations in Czernowitz and Bucharest. It is in this respect all the more significant that the 1988 double issue of Acts, a periodical edited by Benjamin Hollander and published by David Levi Strauss from 514 Guerrero Street, San Francisco Ca. 94110 and devoted entirely to Celan's activities as a translator, never mentions his activity as a translator of Romanian poetry into German or of German or Russian writers into Romanian.

None of the contributors to this volume entitled Translating Tradition: Paul Celan in France appears moreover to have dared discuss any of Celan's rare mistranslations, most of which might well be considered revealing as "Freudian slips." I must limit myself here to pointing out only two such mistranslations, both of them from French. In his German translation of a none too significant little prose poem by his friend Henri Pastoureau, Celan mistranslated "un centaure pie," meaning "a piebald centaur," as "ein frommer Kentaur," meaning "a pious centaur," instead of "ein gescheckter Kentaur." Celan thereby revealed his own lack of any sense of irony or of humor as well as his general tendency, displayed also in many of his other translations, to raise the tone of the original text in order to bring it closer to his own conception of "the sublime."

In his "Remarks on Celan's last translation," that of a very pretentious French poem, Décimale blanche, by his French friend and translator Jean Daive, Professor Bernhard Böschenstein fails to point out that Celan likewise mistranslated

"visage de grand large," which clearly means "face of the high seas," as "Weit-draussen-Gesicht" instead of "Hochseegesicht," thereby complicating Daive's image, whether consciously or unconsciously, by creating an unnecessary German neologism after the manner of the philosopher Martin Heidegger.

It has often been claimed that Celan's very cryptic poetic diction reveals his desire to purge his German of any of the linguistic heirlooms of Hitler's Third Reich. But Heidegger's German had already been condemned in Celan's lifetime, by the Heidelberg philosopher Dolf Sternberger, as typically National-Socialist. This makes it all the more strange that René Char, a hero of the French Resistance during the German occupation of his fatherland, and Celan, a victim of the very worst manifestations of Nazi anti-Semitism, should both have allowed themselves to be seduced by Heidegger's siren-songs so soon after World War II. Such are, however, some of the more puzzling manifestations of the cult of personality in our age.

A few of the most egregious examples of the deliberate disregard of available facts that it can lead an otherwise reputable literary critic to display can be found in a review that George Steiner devoted, in The New Yorker of August 28th 1989, to the Persea Books edition of Michael Hamburger's translations of a selection of Celan's poems. Steiner began there by referring to Celan's life "as a child during the Holocaust, as an exile in Paris,.... as one inebriate with the light-bursts of Jerusalem and of the beloved woman he encountered there." But Celan was already over twenty years old when the Holocaust spread to his native Bukovina; he lived in Paris, like Gertrude Stein, as a willing expatriate, having left Soviet-occupied Czernowitz, then Communist

Romania and finally postwar Austria too without ever being exiled; and his first and only visit to Israel occurred only a few months before he committed suicide in Paris as a married man and father of a French son, having met again in Israel only a couple of women whom he had once loved briefly in Czernowitz or Bucharest, but with whom he had long ceased to correspond at all.

In this dithyrambic article, Steiner goes on to state that noone who met Celan "failed to sense the sombre radiance, the desolateness and apartness of his being," as if poor Celan had been the ill-starred hero of a gothic novel or a Byronic Manfred of sorts. Further on, Steiner lists the image "black milk", repeated several times in Celan's famous "Todesfuge", as one of his "most famous finds," but we now know, from both Chalfen's biography and from other sources that include the recent Insel Verlag reprint of the first volume of the collected poems of Rose Ausländer, that this image was borrowed by Celan from her poem "Ins Leben," first published in 1939 in Czernowitz in her volume entitled Der Regenbogen:

> "Nur aus der Trauer Mutterinnigkeit
> Stromt mir das Vollmass des Erlebens ein.
> Sie speist mir eine lange, trübe Zeit
> mit schwarzem Milch und schwerem Wermutwein."

Steiner also refers to "the inwoven multilingualism of Celan's idiom; Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, French and Italianate words, turns of phrase, acoustic transparencies abound in his German." He omits from this list, however, a language, Romanian, that Celan spoke and wrote fluently, as well as English, from which he translated Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, Andrew Marvell, John Donne, Alfred Housman and Robert Frost, and which reappears occasionally in transparency in Celan's cryptic poem "Huhediblu" as well as elsewhere. Steiner then suggests that "the only legitimate reading " of

Celan's best poems "is by Talmudic or Cabalist methods," although none of Celan's German would lend itself to the kind of legalistic commentary that characterizes the Talmud, or to the gematria and notarikon that characterize Cabalist commentary founded on the numerical values of the Hebrew alphabet, which are not applicable to the Latin alphabet of German. Nor does Celan's poetry lend itself to another Cabalist system of interpretation, that of Pardes/ or of literal, allegorical, metaphorical and anagogical meanings that Dante too proposed for his Divina Commedia in his Latin letter to Can Grande de la Scala.

Much of what Steiner wrote here on Celan can thus be dismissed as but another example of the absurdities to which the cult of personality can lead. It is also significant, however, as an example of the kind of argumentation that can somehow be interpreted as an attempt to refute Theodor Adorno's widely quoted but nevertheless nonsensical remark about the impossibility of writing poetry after Auschwitz, as if the Holocaust had struck all poets dumb, but all left fiction-writers, composers of music, painters and sculptors still capable of expressing themselves adequately.

Because I devote here so much attention to George Steiner's article, some readers may begin to suspect me of harboring a personal grudge against him. But I have chosen to point out a few of its more regrettable flaws for two reasons: it was certainly the most widely read of all articles of this length that had yet been devoted to Celan's life and poetry in English, and its author, both here and in his other writings, has so often displayed his exceptional knowledge of the German language and its literature that some aspects of his uncritical cult of personality in the case of poor Celan are unforgivable. But even in his introduction to the

American edition of Chalfen's biography, Professor John Felstiner, of Stanford University, likewise makes the following statement, as if he hadn't read the contents of the book: "Like millions of others in central and eastern Europe, Celan's family persistently saw their destiny there rather than in emigration." Chalfen states clearly and repeatedly, however, that Celan's father harbored Zionist ideals and was anxious to emigrate with his wife and son to Palestine, which was still governed under a British Mandate. This is also stated implicitl by Celan himself in the two poems where he refers to his father's tragic death. But both Celan and his mother opposed such a plan to emigrate, and there is even some evidence that Celan's mother remained overnight in their home until her actual deportation by the Germans to an extermination camp in Transnistria, still sincerely convinced that the Volk der Dichter und Denker couldn't possibly be the Volk der Schinder und Henker that it had actually turned out to be. For this very reason, she may indeed have failed to follow Ruth Lackner's advice to hide like Celan overnight in a factory during the weekends when the Germans were proceding with their deportations of Jews.

In the introduction to the revised and expanded edition of his Poems of Paul Celan, Michael Hamburger refers in a footnote (Page 21) to the German edition of Chalfen's biography, but likewise still states, as if he hadn't read it, that Celan shared with Nelly Sachs "an obvious preoccupation with the mass killings he had physically survived but could never recover from," though Chalfen reports clearly that Celan had escaped these atrocities without ever witnessing them. The cult of personality can indeed induce writers to lapse into an often very fancifully negligent handling of available facts.

In Celan's poem entitled "Shibboleth", which clearly refers, with its references to Madrid, Estremadura and the Loyalist slogan "No pasaran" to the Spanish Civil War, Hamburger's mistranslation of Celan's "Einhorn" as "Unicorn" is frankly absurd: Chalfen's biography reveals without any possible doubt that the poet is here invoking his young Communist friend Erich Einhorn, whose political sympathies with the Loyalists he then shared. But "Unicorn" is here more puzzling and, one presumes, more poetic.

I must admit that I too was originally inclined to become a victim of this same fatal cult of personality when I first met Celan in Paris in 1952, after reading his "Todesfuge" a couple of years earlier in Vienna. Eighteen years later, in 1970, Celan committed suicide by drowning in the Seine in Paris. At that time, I happened to be at the other end of the world, on the shores of the Pacific Ocean, but I had continued to see Celan fairly often since our first meeting and even associated with him quite closely from time to time. I found him, however, increasingly self-centred as the years went by, often making such weird demands on me that it became more and more convenient to avoid being involved with him in any discussion.

I had originally come across his poem "Todesfuge" in an anthology of younger postwar Viennese writers given to me by its author, Hans Weigel, the Hans-in-allen-Gassen of Viennese literature who had already befriended ill-starred Juri Soyfer, among other victims of Nazi persecution, in Vienna in the Thirties. I was so impressed by this one poem by Celan that I asked Weigel whether he could arrange that I meet its author, but was told that Celan had recently moved from Vienna to Paris. Weigel gave me his Paris address, however, so that I was soon able to write him, inviting him to contribute some poems to Das Lot, which the

French poet Alain Bosquet, the German poet Alexander Koval and I were still editing for Karlheinz Henssel Verlag in West Berlin. We were thus the first to solicit contributions from Celan for a West-German publication, but the Berlin Blockade delayed for a long while the publication of the issue of Das Lot that was to include his poems, so that Die Wandlung, published in Heidelberg by Dold Sternberger, ultimately published Celan ahead of us.

By 1952, both Bosquet and I had moved from Berlin to Paris, where I was editing the French, German and Italian versions of the Ford Foundation's well-intentioned quarterly Perspectives USA under James Laughlin's general editorship of its original English-language edition. I contacted Celan and soon understood that he had no permanent job and was living rather precariously, so that I began to commission him to undertake well paid translations of American texts for the German edition of each issue in turn of Perspectives USA. These translations included, in addition to some critical prose and a few captions for reproductions of works by Ben Shahn, the translation of two poems by Marianne Moore which are now included by Suhrkamp Verlag in the posthumous edition of Celan's complete poems, prose and verse translations, with the notable exception of his previously published translations of a series of French poems by Alain Bosquet, with whom, if I remember right, Celan had later quarreled. I must admit, however, that his translations of Marianne Moore displayed so little sense of her wit and irony that I had to correct them considerably with him before sending them to press. When I chanced to read many years later Celan's "Abzahlreime" and "Grosses Geburtstagsblaublau mit Reimzeug und Assonanz," I realized how ungifted he was for the kind of nonsense poetry in which Christian Morgenstern had already

displayed so brilliantly in German the kind of wit and irony that one associates in English or American literature with such names as Edward Lear or Ogden Nash. But Celan also proved to lack this sense of fun when I introduced him in Paris to the older German poet Peter Gan, once famous too for his wit and whom I also commissioned from time to time to translate American texts for the German edition of Perspectives USA. Celan and Gan appeared to be quite incapable of communicating at all, although Gan, who came of a family of Hamburg patricians, had never been a Nazi and, throughout the Nazi régime, remained in voluntary exile in Paris, then in Madrid when the Germans occupied Paris.

But these little jobs for the quarterly German issues of Perspectives USA were not enough to keep the wolf from poor Celan's door. Some time earlier, Das Lot had already publishe in Berlin a German translation of selections from my friend E.M. Cioran's first French book, Précis de Décomposition. These so impressed a major German publisher, Ernst Rowohl Verlag, that I was suddenly asked whether I could suggest a another translator for the whole book, as the widow of the poet Joachim Ringelnatz, who had translated these selections for Das Lot, was now too ill to undertake the job of translating the whole book. I suggested Celan, who soon obtained the contract and subsequently continued to associate with Cioran as a friend until shortly before his suicide.

One of my friends as a part-time free-lance conference interpreter was Lydia Kerr, a passionate admirer of Rilke and herself a trilingual or quadrilingual poet of sorts, but above all Chief of the translating and interpreting services of the International Labour Organization, an United Nations Agency located in Geneva. She turned up for a few days in Paris and, in the course of a conversation, expressed to me

her admiration for what little of Celan's poetry she had managed to read. She was also seeking to recruit a new translator from English or French into German for her ~~office~~ office, so that I promptly recommended Celan ~~to her~~ and invited them both to dine together in my apartment. Lydia immediately engaged him and he soon moved to a generously paid job in Geneva, but his work there soon proved to be beneath his signity as a rhapsodic bard and he returned to Paris, where he was fortunately offered, some time later, a steady but less demanding job as Lecturer in German Literature at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, a civil service job similar to the one that Samuel Beckett had long held there in English Literature. Celan retained this job until his death.

Rudolf Hirsch, the interim editor of the illustrious German literary journal Die Neue Rundschau for S. Fischer Verlag in Frankfurt-am-Main, had meanwhile come across the English translations of a few Portuguese poems by Fernando Pessoa which I had published in Chicago in Poetry: a Magazine of Verse. He suddenly asked me whether I knew anyone who might now assist me in translating them into German too. I proposed Celan, of course, though he didn't know any Portuguese. We undertook the task together, with me producing rough word-for-word translations into German, which he proceded to rewrite in more poetic diction, though I sometimes found it ~~difficult~~ difficult to convince him ~~that~~ that Pessoa, especially under his "heteronyms" as Alvaro de Campos and Alberto Caeiro, often avoided very deliberately expressing himself in traditionally poetic diction. Be that all as it may, Celan saw to it that our translations be published under his name "unter Mitarbeit von Edouard Roditi" rather than under our joint names. Under German

copyright law, our translations are now reprinted in Celan's complete works without my being authorized to claim any royalties on them or to reprint them under our joint names in any similar edition of my own collected writings.

This collaboration with Celan proved at the time to be only one of the first among several other incidents that gradually led me, and Bosquet too, to realize how pathologically egocentric poor Celan really was. Another and more embarrassing incident arose when Poetry: a Magazine of Verse asked me to contribute a selection of translations of new German poets. Without any hesitation, I selected and translated a couple of short poems by Celan, some by Koval, my close friend and co-editor of Das Lot, and some by Enzensberger, whom I had but recently met in Paris. It never occurred to me that Celan would be mortally offended by finding himself published in such company, but the tone of his indignant protests warned me to avoid any further such attempts to promote him as the remarkably gifted poet that I still believe him to have been. Oddly enough, it was as a consequence of our collaboration on the Pessoa translations for a periodical published by S. Fischer Verlag that Celan was soon able to transfer his allegiance from Deutsche Verlagsanstalt Stuttgart, which had been his original publisher in Western Germany, to the much more prestigious and powerful combine of Insel Verlag, S. Fischer Verlag and Suhrkamp Verlag that happens to publish me too, from time to time, in German.

I finally decided to avoid any further misunderstandings with Celan at the time of his truly absurd quarrel with Claire Goll, the widow of my very old friend the trilingual

witnesses, or at least to file affidavits to the effect that no trace of Goll's poetry could be detected in any of his own. When Celan approached me as a potential witness, ~~I~~ I was tactless enough to laugh the whole matter off while pointing out that all poets, whether consciously or unconsciously, reflect some of their readings in their own poems. Virgil, I argued, thus remains a great poet in spite of his borrowings from Homer and Apollonius Rhodius and perhaps Ennius too in the Aeneid, or from Hesiod in the Georgics or Theocritus in his Eclogues. Should Milton have been ashamed of his borrowings from Dante or Tasso? Stravinsky, I tried to reassure Celan, would certainly refrain from suing anyone who might suggest that he had borrowed in Jeu de Cartes a musical theme from Rossini.

Celan's reactions to my remarks left me speechless. He accused me of now joining the pack of anti-Semites who, in the German press and elsewhere, were already beginning to accuse him, though I was not yet aware of this, of other and far more obvious borrowings. Only many years later, from my readings of Chalfen's biography, then of the first volume of the Insel Verlag edition of the complete poems of Rose Ausländer and of Maximilian Bleyleben's very faithful translations of a few of the poems of Celan's immensely gifted and even more unfortunate compatriot and former friend Immanuel Weissglass, born in Czernowitz the same year as both Celan and Alfred Gong, did I realize how much Celan borrowed in "Todesfuge" from other German-language Bukovina-born writers with whom he had associated in Czernowitz on his return from his Romanian forced labor camp in Moldavia.

In one of these poems in particular, Weissglass described, while still toiling there, his experience of the death-camps in Tansnistria where Celan's parents perished. Later too, I found much of this reported more factually and in greater detail in

the previously mentioned journal of the painter Arnold Dagani, whom Chalfen also quotes as one of the sources for Celan's information about how his parents died in Transnistria.

In addition of his borrowing of "black blood" in "Todesfuge" from his friend Rose Ausländer's poem, Celan borrowed even more from the following poem, entitled "Er", which Immanuel Weissglass had written in the Transnistrian death-camp from which he managed to save both himself and his aging mother:

"Wir heben Gräber in die Luft und siedeln
Mit Weib und Kind an den gebotnen Ort.
Wir schaufeln fleissig, und die andern fiedeln.
Man schafft ein Grab und fahrt im Tanzen fort.

Er will, dass über diese Därme dreister
Der Bogen strenge wie sein Antlitz streiche:
Spielt sanft vom Tod, er ist ein deutscher Meister,
Der durch die Lande als ein Nebel schleicht.

Und wenn die Dämmrung blutig quilt am Abend,
Offn' ich nachzehrend den verbissenen Mund,
Ein Haus fur alle in die Lufte grabend:
Breit wie der Sarg, schmal wie die Todesstund.

Er spielt im Haus mit Schlangen, graut und dichtet,
In Deutschland dämmert es wie Gretchens Haar.
Das Grab in Wolken wird nicht eng gerichtet:
Da weit der Tod ein Deutscher Meister war."

For the poetry of Immanuel Weissglass, so different from his own in style in spite of occasional similarities in theme or imagery, Celan is reported to have expressed, whether in Czernowitz or later in Bucharest, at best a kind of somewhat patronizing condescension. The corrections in Celan's handwriting that Jerry Glenn has found on some of the surviving manuscripts of Alfred Gong suggest much the same kind of condescension of a master towards a disciple. Oddly enough,

both Weissglass and Gong display, in the form of a few of their poems but above all in their bitter irony and ~~xxxxxxxxx~~al occasional overt references to well-known lyrics by Heinrich Heine, their admiration for German literature's greatest Jewish poet, the cynosure of all anti-Semites for more than a hundred years. Some of their poetry also appears to display the influence of a few of the Expressionist poets of Berlin, such as Alfred Lichtenstein or Jacob van Hoddis, whose best-known poems were available in several popular anthologies of contemporary German poetry which had been published before 1933. Weissglass was obviously remembering Heine, for instance, when he began his own "Loreley" with the following overt parody:

"Was soll es, dass ich traurig bin, bedeuten?
Zur Tiefe lockt mich deine Fratze, Tyll!
Am Felsen ding ich, gleich verlassnen Brauten,
Und herr des Schelms, den ich verderben will."

Gong likewise begins one of his early lyrics with a similar parody of another of Heine's most widely quoted poems:

"In die Heimat kamen die Grenadier
Aus Krieg und Gefangenschaft.
Sie fanden sehr verdunnt das Bier,
Das Leben ohne Saft."

Both Weissglass and Gong also repeatedly elide in their verse the mute vowels of literary Hochdeutsch, much as Heine did too, again and again, in many of his most famous poems, such as Atta Troll or Deutschland, ein Wintermarchen, where he allows himself to lapse into spoken German and even into rhymes, such as "bedeuten" and "Zeiten", that betray his own accent as a native of Dusseldorf.

Nowhere, in all of Celan's poems, have I yet been able to detect a single hint of an admiration for any of Heine's poems, a fact which may well explain his reported lack of

of sympathy for the poetry of Gong and Weissglass. Nor have I yet been able to detect in Celan's poetry any evidence of an overt interest in the poetry of any of the major Berlin Expressionists, except the very short poem from Schneepart where he deliberately parodies one of Brecht's most famous anti-Nazi songs:

"Ein Blatt
fur Bertolt Brecht:

Was sind das fur Zeiten,
wo ein Gesprach
beinah ein Verbrechen ist,
weil es so viel Gesagtes
mit einschliesst?"

But Celan is careful here to strip Brecht's original statement of all its political significance and impact.

Celan is known, however, to have been acquainted with the poetry of Yvan Goll, of course, but also with that of Else Lasker-Schuler, and my admiration for her writings even occasioned my first unintentional moment of tension in my relations with Celan. I had known Else Lasker-Schuler briefly in Berlin before her first trip to ~~Israel~~ Palestine and we had then corresponded for a while about my proposed translations of some of her poems into French as well as into English. After first reading one of Celan's poems, "Ein Lied in der Wuste", in Mohn und Gedachtnis, I was tactless enough to remark delightedly to him that it reminded me of some of Else Lasker-Schuler's poetry. Celan's reaction to this truly innocent obiter dictum was almost as if I had accused him directly of plagiarism.

He appeared indeed to be at all times convinced of the absolute originality of everything that he wrote; to such an extent that his fears of displaying in his poems their biographical or literary sources may well have led him, as the years went by, to become increasingly cryptic. At best, he might admit having emulated Holderlin, Rilke or

Trakl, but never that he might have borrowed anything from them.

He was very secretive too about his own Jewish cultural background in Bukovina, especially after his Paris marriage to a French graphic artist who comes of an aristocratic and reputedly anti-semitic family. Chalfen thus reports in his biography that Celan displayed in his youth an admiration for the works of the older Jewish artist Artur Kolnik, at one time fairly widely known as "the Chagall of Galicia and Bukovina." A survivor of the Holocaust, Kolnik was living and exhibiting in Paris after World War II. Because I reviewed one of his shows favorably in L'Arche, the monthly periodical of the Jewish communities of France, Kolnik very kindly gave me one of his very fine lithographs in color, depicting a Purim scene in Galicia or Bukovina. When Celan saw it in my apartment, he displayed no interest in it, nor did he ever display any interest in meeting the immensely talented painter Avigdor Arikha, an Israeli resident of Paris, but a Bukovina-born survivor of the death-camps in Transnistria where Celan's parents perished.

More and more Celan appeared to behave as if he were the sole Jewish survivor of the Holocaust, or at least the only one authorized, as if by some divine election, to bear witness to it in writing. It is perhaps significant in this respect that, in the otherwise admirable speech that he delivered in 1960 on the occasion of his acceptance of the prestigious Geor Büchner literary prize, he refrained from mentioning the name of Karl Emil Franzos (1848-1904). This otherwise once widely read Austrian-Jewish writer was Galician-born, but spent much of his childhood and adolescence in Czernowitz and is now remembered mainly for the single-handed lite-

literary resurrection of Georg Buchner, whose manuscripts Franzos retrieved, carefully transcribed and finally published in 1879 in the first edition of Buchner's complete works. But Franzos happened to be also the author of some very popular stories about the Jews of Galicia and Bukovina which were still known by Celan in his boyhood and despised by him as were also the yiddish writings of his compatriots Elieser Steinberg and Itzik Manger.

What puzzled me most about Celan in this general context was his ever more overtly expressed admiration for the writings of Martin Heidegger, that arch-anti-Semite among contemporary philosophers. This admiration was all the more surprising when I began to realize, from my arguments with Celan on this subject, that he had only the very vaguest notions of the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Descartes, Kant or Hegel. As for Ludwig Wittgenstein, some of whose works I happened to be reading when Celan and I were translating Pessoa together, he appeared to have never heard of him or not to be at all interested in reading him.

Long before ever meeting Celan, I wrote a series of aphorisms on poetry and poets. One of them was a parody of the once widely quoted Victorian remark : "Children should be seen but not heard." In spite of my truly formative friendships with T.S. Eliot, Paul Goodman, Kenneth Rexroth, Léon-Paul Fargue and Alain Bosquet, and my very pleasant though brief relationship with Dylan Thomas, I couldn't refrain from writing: "Great poets should be read, but not met." This has proven in my life to be particularly true of my few meetings with W.H. Auden and my far more numerous meetings with Celan, though I continue to read much of their poetry with delight.

A half century ago, I may well have been the very first American or English writer to develop suddenly a great and lasting interest in the poetry of Paul Celan, in fact an interest that managed to survive close on twenty years of an often very difficult personal relationship with him. Today Celan already shares the honor, with Rilke and Brecht, of being the most widely translated of all twentieth-century German-language poets, in spite of proving, in much of his poetry, to be one of the most untranslatable. He has even been translated, believe it or not, into Arabic, and published privately in an edition in that language that bears no indication of copyright or of date of publication, but reprints also the original German text of the twenty-one poems translated there by A.K. El Djanabi. Selected from Mohn und Gedächtnis, Von Schwelle zu Schwelle, Sprachgitter, Die Niemandsrose, Atemwende, Fadensonnen, Lichtzwang, Schneepart and Zeitgehöft, these very ambitious translations include, of course, one of "Todesfuge", which may puzzle some readers in Bagdad, in the Gaza Strip or elsewhere. My regrettable illiteracy in literary Arabic precludes, alas, my offering here an appreciation of A.K. El Djanabi's skill as a translator or of the critical acumen displayed in his brief introduction.

Edouard Roditi.

Suggested further reading of books by Edouard Roditi

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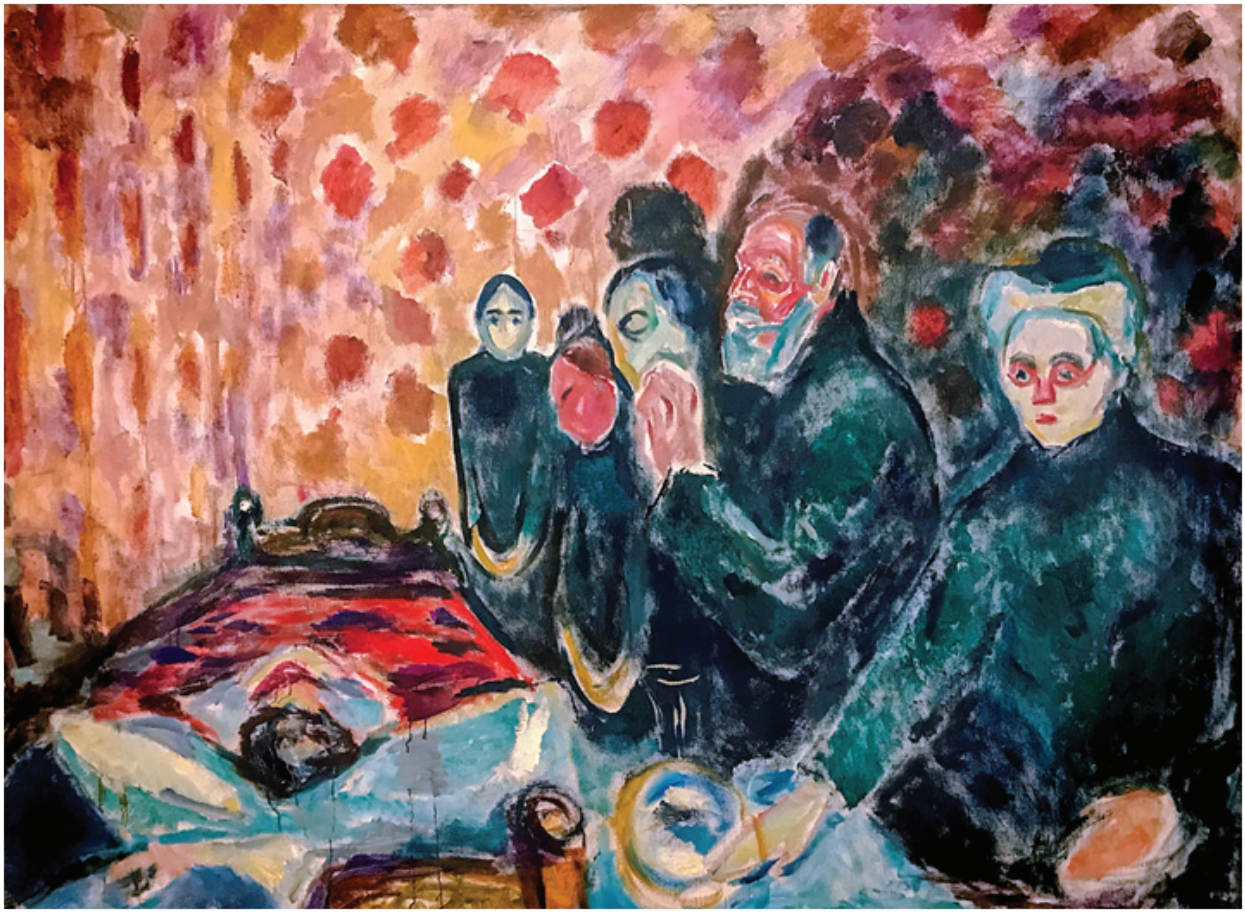

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